

VISIONS OF GOD
by Willis E. Bishop

From Study in Ezekiel

"I saw visions of God." In chapter 1, verse 28: "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." Incidentally, this vision occurs several times in Ezekiel, and this is one of them. Chapter 10, verse 18 speaks of the glory of the Lord. Verse 20: "This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar, and I knew they were the cheru-bim." Notice, Ezekiel identifies that man on the throne as the God of Israel. This is one of the most remarkable chapters in Scripture because it is a vision of God on that throne.

- Q. We agree, I believe, that no man has ever seen God. Also there seems to be an understanding, at least some people feel that even in Heaven we will not see God because He is a spirit. However, the Bible tells us that we were made in the image of God, and that does not necessarily mean physical. Since what he saw was the likeness of a man, could that possibly have been our Lord Jesus?
- A. Yes, I believe it was. In Genesis 32, Jacob on his return after so many years away from home, and Esau, his brother, is coming to meet him. You remember that Esau had threatened to kill Jacob. That night before meeting Esau, in verse 24, Jacob wrestled with a man until the breaking of the day. Then in verse 28 the man says, "Your name shall be no longer called Jacob but Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed." "Then Jacob asked saying, 'Tell me your name, I pray.' He said, 'Why is it that you ask Me My name?' And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face." ["Pan" is face; "el" is God.] So Jacob there says, "I have seen God face to face."

Exodus 24:9-10 - the children of Israel encamped around Sinai: "Then Moses went up, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, like the very heaven in its clearness. But the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hands on. And they saw God and they ate and drank," that is, before Him.

Deuteronomy 34:10, after the death of Moses: "And since then then there has not arisen a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."

Judges 13 (we could spend a whole period in this chapter alone) - this is the Angel of the Lord appearing to Manoah and his wife and promising the birth of a son. Verse 16: "The Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, 'Though you detain Me I will not eat your bread, and if you prepare a burnt offering you must offer it to the Lord (for Manoah did not know that He was

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the Angel of the Lord). [Verse 17] Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, 'What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?'" Verse 22: "And Manoah said to his wife, 'We shall surely die because we have seen God.'"

I Kings 22 - the story of the prophet Micaiah - verse 19: "Therefore, hear the word of the Lord; I saw the Lord sitting on His throne."

Isaiah 6 - one of the more familiar passages relating to this - verse 1: "In the year that King Ussiah died, then I saw the Lord, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple."

Daniel 7:9: "I watched till thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days was seated. [God has a throne in heaven, but He has other thrones that are set up.] His garment was white as snow, the hair of His head was like pure wool, His throne was like fiery flames, its wheels [notice, it had wheels] a burning fire." So there Daniel sees the Ancient of Days.

All of those passages imply that God was seen. There is another set of passages.

John 1:18 - this is the verse you referred to: "No one has seen God. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him." There is the opposite - "No one has seen God at any time."

I Timothy 1:17: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, [and there is our word] invisible."

I Timothy 6:16: "who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen."

So there are two sets of verses which seem to be somewhat contradictory. In one set they saw God, they ate with God, etc., and yet in the other set it says no man has seen God.

Some explanations:

In the case of Moses, who spoke to God face to face. That does not necessarily mean that he saw God at that point. For example, in the middle of the night my wife is somewhere over there and I might ask, "How are you doing?" I don't see her but I speak face to face with her. That could be.

Some appearances are in vision and not in reality, such as Isaiah chapter 6 and chapter 7. Some are theophanies. You could not say that the invisible God could not appear in a

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temporary, visible form. But no one has seen God in His spiritual essence at any time. And that's the point you were making in John 1:18.

Many of these Old Testament appearances are Christophanies. For example, in Judges 13 where it says "We have seen God," that definitely was the preincarnate Christ. John chapter 1, the Son has revealed the Lord. II Corinthians 4:7, "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Sometimes the appearance of God is in a vision, sometimes it is a theophany (a temporary appearance), and sometimes it is an appearance of the preincarnate Christ.

I have noted that even in the Jewish explanation of this passage in Ezekiel they expressed the opinion that perhaps a sense of God was seen by Ezekiel. The Talmud has a saying, "There's a large face of God and a small face, and man can only see the small face."

Do you know, I've never seen my face? I've looked in the mirror and have seen something there, but I've never seen my face, and I'm not in a hurry to see it. So you can say that you've seen God, but you haven't seen God. That is the kind of language I believe we have in the Scripture.

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